


Date: September 30, 2008

To: Audit and Finance Committee

From: Gary Ray, City Auditor 

Subject: Audit of Police Evidence Section Policies & Procedures

Cc: George Gascon, Chief of Police
Michael Dvorak, Assistant Police Chief - Support Services
William Peters, Police Operations Support Division Commander
Shirl Butler, Police Technical Services Division Administrator
Lane Darling, Police Evidence Supervisor
Patricia Sorensen, Assistant to the City Manager

Pursuant to the Council-approved audit plan the City Auditor's Office has completed an audit of the Police Department Evidence Section Policies & Procedures.

The purpose of this letter is to transmit the report to the Audit and Finance Committee. The report package consists of the report, Corrective Action Plans (CAPs), and the Management Response.

We would like to thank the management and staff of the Police Operations Support and Technical Services Divisions for their cooperation, professionalism, and assistance throughout the audit process.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at x3210 or Jerry Faccone at x2403.

AUDIT REPORT

Department: City of Mesa Police Department
Division: Operations Support Division

Audit Subject: Evidence Section – Policies & Procedures

Date Completed: June 2, 2008
Report Date: August 12, 2008
Audit Period: July 1990 – February 2008

Purpose: The objectives of the audit were to:

- Determine that the Police Department property and evidence function is managed and operated effectively and efficiently.
- Evaluate compliance with state laws and regulations, as well as department policies and procedures concerning property and evidence.
- Determine that proper internal controls exist, and are working as intended to safeguard property and evidence from loss or fraud.
- Ascertain that accurate and complete records are maintained for the processing, recording, storing, monitoring and disposition of property and evidence.

Scope: To accomplish this audit we:

- Reviewed state laws and Police Department policies and procedures involving evidence.
- Reviewed the internal controls over the evidence function.
- Performed detailed testing of evidence and property sample items to determine that all Evidence Section functions are operating effectively and efficiently.
- Made inquiries and performed audit procedures to gain assurance that all property and evidence retrieved by the Police Department has been processed and monitored by the Evidence Section.

Comments: The audit resulted in three findings that are detailed in the attached Corrective Action Plans along with recommendations for improvement.

Conclusion: Overall, the Police Department evidence function is operating effectively and internal controls are working to safeguard property and evidence. There is an acceptable audit trail for the processing, recording, storing, monitoring and disposition of evidence. Departmental policies and procedures are comprehensive and are being followed by the Evidence Section staff. The staff is also adhering to state laws and regulations regarding evidence.

Corrective Action Plan #1

Audit Subject: Police Department Evidence Section

August 12, 2008

Title:	Evidence Submission Errors
---------------	-----------------------------------

Observations: Evidence submission errors are not resolved in a timely manner.

Comments: As documented by Section 01.500 of the Police Department Evidence Section Supplemental Manual, Evidence Section employees review evidence submissions and when errors are noted, send notices to submitting officers requesting correction. Submission errors include incomplete impound records, incorrect category codes, absence of signatures, improper packaging and incomplete integrity seals. All items are required to be corrected by the submitting officer within 72 hours. If errors are not resolved within this time frame, a second notice is required to be sent to the submitting officer and the officer's Sergeant. Evidence employees are required to send a third notice to the submitting officer's Sergeant and Lieutenant if the error has not been corrected within 48 hours of the second notice.

The Submission Correction Log tested in the audit consisted of 25 evidence items submitted with errors. While all items were corrected within a month and the Log substantiated the efforts of Evidence Section employees in processing the improperly submitted items, follow up correction notices were not sent on a timely basis. Second notices for correction on eight items were sent 2-3 weeks after receipt of the evidence items rather than after 72 hours as required. Also, a third notice on one item was sent twelve days after the second notice rather than after 48 hours.

Recommendations: We recommend that Evidence Section personnel process evidence submission errors in a timely manner according to policy.

Corrective Action Plan #2

Audit Subject: Police Department Evidence Section

August 12, 2008

Title:	Evidence Storage
---------------	-------------------------

Observations: The Evidence Section is reaching full storage capacity.

Comments: Evidence is properly reviewed and approved for disposition, however, disposition is not carried out on a timely basis. Items approved for disposition continue to occupy space in the Evidence Section. Audit testing revealed that evidence from a shoplifting case, consisting of videotapes and Polaroid photographs that had been approved for disposition for over 9 months, was not yet destroyed. Firearms and ammunition, from an aggravated assault case that had been approved for disposition 17 months earlier, were still in the evidence inventory.

A file cabinet in the Evidence Section contains documentation on numerous cases for which evidence continues to be retained despite disposition approval. The evidence storage situation needs to be addressed. Storage space is an area of concern both currently and in the foreseeable future.

Recommendations: We recommend that Evidence Section personnel currently dispose of all items that have been approved for disposition and establish a strategy for the timely disposition of evidence in the future.

Corrective Action Plan #3

Audit Subject: Police Department Evidence Section

August 12, 2008

Title:	Evidence Identification Numbers
Observations:	Lack of accountability over the numerical sequence of property ID numbers.
Comments:	<p data-bbox="511 537 1409 810">Evidence items received by the Mesa Police Department are recorded in an electronic evidence management system. For cases prior to May 11, 2005, evidence items were submitted through the TRAQ system. The range of TRAQ numbers during the audit period consisted of 630,206 evidence items. For cases after May 11, 2005, evidence items are submitted through the I/LEADS RMS system. The range of I/LEADS numbers consisted of 350,452 evidence items.</p> <p data-bbox="511 842 1409 978">When evidence is recorded, the system selects the next available sequential number for identification of the item. The sequential issuance of identification numbers is a control that is necessary to help prevent the loss or misappropriation of evidence.</p> <p data-bbox="511 1010 1409 1083">Testing of the numerical sequence of ID numbers resulted in the following:</p> <ul data-bbox="511 1083 1409 1493" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="511 1083 1409 1251">• There were 14 numbers unaccounted for in the TRAQ system. According to PD, the missing numbers resulted from how information from both the I/LEADS and TRAQ systems was being reconciled when final dispositions for evidence destructions and auctions were being processed.<li data-bbox="511 1251 1409 1356">• 1,733 numbers were deleted from the I/LEADS system. The deleted numbers are the result of the removal from the system of evidence items erroneously entered in duplicate.<li data-bbox="511 1356 1409 1493">• 15,455 numbers were discarded or lost by the I/LEADS system. Discarded numbers result from the cancellation of the process of adding an evidence item to the system. The numbers lost are the result of system crashes. <p data-bbox="230 1524 1409 1719">Recommendations: We recommend that controls be put in place assuring that all evidence identification numbers are accounted for. Numbers should not be deleted from the system for any reason. All numbers that are discarded or lost by the system should be immediately documented with explanations to assure proper control of numerical sequence.</p>



**MESA POLICE DEPARTMENT
INTEROFFICE MEMO**



TO: Chris Brady, City Manager ^{CB}
THRU: George Gascón, Chief of Police
FROM: Bill Peters, Commander Support Services
Shirl Butler, Administrator Technical Services *Shirl Butler 9/24/08*
Lane Darling, Evidence Supervisor
DATE: September 15, 2008
SUBJ: Response to City Audit of the Evidence Section

The purpose of this memo is to respond to the three findings from the audit or the Evidence Section that was performed by the Mesa City Auditor's Office.

Finding #1: Evidence submission errors are not resolved in a timely manner.

Response: On September 2nd, 2008 one of the two vacant Evidence Technician positions was filled. The other vacancy has not been approved to fill and still exists. Because of this it has been difficult to provide a permanently assigned Evidence Technician to the correction process. As a result, the correction process has been reorganized, and the Senior Evidence Technician and the Evidence Supervisor will now be processing second and third notices.

In addition, policy regarding the correction process has been revised to better define the time requirements for initiating correction notifications. These changes should result in second and third notices being sent within the time requirements outlined in the Evidence Supplemental manual.

Finding #2: The Evidence Section is reaching full storage capacity.

Response: The Evidence Section is currently involved in a Six Sigma project that is reviewing the disposition and disposal process to see if improvements can be made in the disposition and disposal of evidence. The findings of the Six Sigma project are expected by the end of September 2008.

In coordination with City and County Prosecutors, department disposal policies have been revised and are in the process of being approved and implemented. The revised policies

should provide an increased number of items authorized for disposal such as large quantities of drugs, drug paraphernalia and certain misdemeanor evidence.

Reorganization of duties and reassignment of personnel have also been made in order to focus on the disposition and disposal of evidence.

Finding #3: Lack of accountability over the numerical sequence of property ID numbers. The associated corrective action plan from Gary Ray, City Auditor, states: *"We recommend that controls be put in place assuring that all evidence identification numbers are accounted for. Numbers should not be deleted from the system for any reason. All numbers that are discarded or lost by the system should be immediately documented with explanations to assure proper control of numerical sequence."*

Response: The numerical identification numbers used in the Evidence unit of Mesa PD are generated out of two systems, TRAQ and I/Leads. TRAQ was the system first used by Mesa PD. Beginning in May 2005 the I/Leads system has been used for tracking all items entered into evidence. Consequently, TRAQ is used for processing evidence relating to cases entered prior to May 2005 where evidence for that case is still being held in TRAQ. All new evidence items are entered into our I/Leads system; therefore no new identification numbers are being generated in TRAQ.

TRAQ system sequential numbering information

All instances where missing numbers were identified during the most recent audit coincide with destructions or auctions. Through December 2007 there were issues with how the information from both I/LEADS and TRAQ was being reconciled when doing final disposals i.e. burns or auctions.

During those times if an item that was in I/LEADS was scanned while doing these final disposal transaction while the technician was in TRAQ it would create an "itemid". When caught at the time by either the IA auditor or Evidence technician the transaction would be cancelled which in turn would flush that "itemid" from the system.

A report can be created listing these numbers, which may be able to document such instances.

I/Leads system sequential numbering information

A report can be produced that lists all Property ID Numbers used up to the point of creating the report. The report can identify whether the Property ID Number is currently in use in the I/LEADS system, was deleted (by special written request) out of I/LEADS or is "unresolved". "Unresolved" means that an action happened to the Property ID Number outside of the normal system processing functions. The

"Unresolved" items never existed in the I/LEADS system. This results from one of two causes:

1. When someone selects to add a property item, the system assigns it the next available Property ID in sequence. If the person cancels the operation, the item is never added to the system, and the number is discarded and not re-used.
2. If the system crashes while someone is adding a new record, the next available Property ID has already been assigned, but the process never completed and the number is lost and not re-used.

Once a property item has been entered it cannot be changed. Consequently, deleting numbers is a necessity when it is discovered that evidence has been entered on the wrong case, entries have been duplicated or entered incorrectly to ensure the accuracy of property associated with the police report.

To change the way the system functions will require substantial modifications to the system by the vendor. Based on past experience with our vendor, we can estimate that the cost would be substantial. To give a sense of this, less substantial modifications have cost around \$25,000 and taken 6 – 12 months for the vendor to design, build, test and deliver that software to us. It cannot be assumed that the vendor can meet this request at all.

Costs associated for these changes have not been budgeted in this fiscal year. If these changes are to be implemented it will be necessary to get budgetary estimates from the vendor, then determine if contingency funding is available or propose they be funded in upcoming fiscal cycles. Mesa PD can begin discussions with the vendor to identify needed changes and request a quote for time and effort.